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Peter Hauser

History and Systems of Psychology

Department of Psychology

College of Liberal Arts

2005–2006 winter quarter

Background

The History and Systems of Psychology course provides background to the development of current psychological perspectives. It examines beliefs, practices, achievements and limitations of various systems of psychology from Greek times through to the late 20th century.

Objectives

Upon completion of this course, students will:

- Be able to describe how the field of psychology developed and evolved
- Be able to identify individuals who have made major contributions
- Be able to describe the various systems of psychology
- Develop better presentation skills
- Develop online discussion skills

Method

Traditionally, History and Systems of Psychology has been a lecture course where most of the in-class time is spent listening to lectures offered by the instructor and being tested on lectures and assigned readings. Students have been required to write a term paper about a psychologist who has made a major contribution to the field or on a specific system within psychology. Some instructors have required students to give an in-class presentation on their paper at the end of the quarter. The major problem with this instruction method is that it is boring. It is a challenge to maintain the students' attention and interest in the topic. Students often fall behind assigned readings and this always has a negative impact on the depth and breath of the in-class discussions.

Lectures

My blended version of History and Systems of Psychology involved 50 percent in-class lectures and 50 percent online discussions and quizzes. The

reduction of in-class time was compensated for by more assigned readings. The assigned readings covered the various systems of psychology, while the in-class lectures focused more on the contributions of the field of philosophy to the development of psychology and early history of psychology.

Weekly quizzes

Students were assigned weekly online quizzes that consisted of 30 multiple-choice questions that were based on the chapters they were assigned to read. For each quiz, approximately 50 questions were uploaded into the myCourses quiz question library, and 30 random questions were automatically chosen for each student. The multiple-choice answers were also randomized to prevent students from sharing the answers for specific questions. The students' scores on the quizzes were automatically uploaded to the myCourses gradebook and the correct answers were provided at the end of the quiz period.

Weekly online team discussions

Early in the quarter I created teams of three to four students and appointed team leaders. Each team was assigned a set of five essay questions wherein each student had to choose one essay question to answer and respond to at least two of the other students' answers. Each team was given the same set of five questions each week. The team discussions were restricted—students were not able to read other teams' answers. The team leader was responsible for keeping track of the team members' progress and the teams were graded as a whole, based on their participation. I monitored the discussions to ensure the quality of the responses were appropriate. With quality standardized by the instructor across groups, it made it possible to fairly grade on participation alone. Team members had the right to make a recommendation to the instructor to have a team member voted off the team and graded individually. The team leader and I provided team members who were falling behind with ample opportunity to catch up before the team felt a need to vote off a member.

Team presentations

Each team was also assigned to give a 20-minute in-class presentation at the end of the quarter on a topic that has been discussed throughout the history of psychology (i.e., views on psychopathology and types of treatment recommended, mind-body relationships or nature versus nurture). The presentations were to include the past history, current practice and thought and future directions on the chosen topic. Students presented fragments of their final presentation in class throughout the quarter and were evaluated

by their peers as well as the instructor (using an evaluation form with a Likert scale). The teams were ranked based on the results of the evaluations and a specific grade was assigned to each rank. The final presentation was evaluated in a similar manner, but by guest judges (students, faculty, and administrators) rather than by peers. Students were assigned to work on their presentations on a weekly basis via an online discussion forum in myCourses that was restricted to the team members only. Similarly, team members could recommend a member to be voted out of the team and graded individually based on a deficit in the quality or quantity of their participation.

Results

Lectures

The reduction in the students' seat time in-class resulted in a reduction in lectures offered in class (a 50 percent reduction). Nevertheless, more material was covered than previously in a non-blended session because of the online features offered in this course as discussed in the following subsections.

Weekly quizzes

The preparation for the weekly quizzes was the most time-consuming component of this blended course for me. I had to use a software program in the Online Learning department to convert the questions to HTML format then had to follow more than 25 steps to get the quizzes uploaded onto myCourses, set up the randomization feature and connect them to the gradebook. This process took over an hour the first time I tried to do it but, by the end of the quarter, I was able to achieve this task in less than 10 minutes. The students reported that the weekly quizzes took them between one- to two-hours to complete. Even though this was an open-book quiz, not all of the students obtained a perfect score on this quiz. The class average was 86 percent correct.

Weekly online team discussions

The weekly team discussions were more successful than I initially anticipated when I developed this course. The breadth and depth of the topics the students discussed exceeded my expectations. Each student successfully answered one assigned essay question as expected, but responded to more of the other students' essay answers than required, and some of the discussions continued beyond the allocated time for the assigned chapter discussion. Students asked each other questions and related topics to experiences in

their lives and to other materials they learned in this and other courses. The average number of posts per team made by the end of the quarter was 178 posts (approximately 45 posts per student). I participated in the team discussions when students had questions (in their responses to student essays) that could not be answered by the other team members, when the quality of a students' essay needed work and when I had something to add to the discussion.

"The use of asynchronous online discussions removed the barriers that often exist for out-of-classroom work between deaf/hard-of-hearing students and hearing students."

Team presentations

Teams began working on their presentations at the beginning of the quarter within a discussion forum that was developed for each team for this assignment. The average number of online posts made by each team was 285 (approximately 75 posts per student). The students discussed and voted on the topics they wanted to cover in their presentations and shared outlines, drafts PowerPoint slides and scripts. This enabled teams to work together throughout the week and throughout the quarter even when they were not in class or meeting with each other in person. I followed the students' progress by reading their online discussions and I was able to provide immediate feedback and advice.

Other online features

In the beginning of the course, students were asked to introduce themselves online in a specific discussion forum that was developed for this purpose. Although there were only 15 students in this class, 119 posts were made. This enabled the students to get to know each other better than students in a non-blended course, because this type of discussion rarely occurs within the classroom, especially among all members of the class. Students began talking to each other within this discussion forum, sharing their mutual interests in specific hobbies or life experiences. I believe that this enabled the class to build relationships that were positively reflected within the classroom when they had in-class discussions. The students affect on and interest in each other was substantially different than I have experienced in my non-blended courses.

Another discussion forum was created for any course-related questions or comments. This forum had a total of 126 posts by the end of the quarter. This reduced my need to respond to individual e-mails about course content and assignments. In my non-blended courses, I often find myself having to

answer the same question to several students via e-mail. This also helped students who might have had the same question but did not intend to actually ask the question or students who have not thought of the question but benefited from the answer.

The development and maintenance of a new blended course takes substantially more time than a traditional in-class course. This is because the instructor has to create the appropriate tools (i.e., quizzes, discussions and uploading of lectures) within myCourses. However, once everything has been created, it can easily be imported to future sessions of the course. The maintenance of a live blended course is still time-consuming. The instructor needs to check the course discussions on a regular basis. The total amount of time an instructor spends on reading and posting messages in any given week can go beyond the amount of time it would have taken to give an additional lecture that week. A total of 2,095 messages were posted in this course.

I found it necessary to check messages on a regular basis (i.e., every day, during the day and evenings, including weekends), which made it much more manageable than if I attempted to read messages and post responses only once or twice a week. If I did the latter, it would cause two problems: (1) it would require me to allocate a significant time period to achieve this task in one sitting; and (2) students would not feel as motivated to participate in online discussions if I had not provided immediate responses.

Even though the amount of time I spent throughout the week, day and night, was significant, I was always motivated to catch up on the recent online discussions, as were my students because the discussions were lively. I believe this had a positive impact on my and my students' interest and intrinsic motivation in being committed to this course.

The inclusion of weekly online quizzes and team discussions allowed the students to learn more material than what was provided in the course lectures. When providing a lecture, it is often difficult to tell where students had trouble understanding the theories and principles discussed. The weekly discussion forum and the results of the weekly quizzes enabled me to see where students were having difficulty and to provide additional instruction by posting relevant messages online. Within the team presentations discussion forums, the students applied what they learned from the chapters (via quizzes and essay assignments) to their projects, which further helped them with their learning of the course material.

This course had six deaf/hard-of-hearing students in addition to nine

hearing students. Three of the four team leaders were deaf/hard-of-hearing. I intentionally appointed deaf/hard-of-hearing team leaders for several reasons:

1. They often do not have an opportunity to be a group leader in a mainstream classroom
2. They typically have extensive experience using online means for everyday communicating
3. They usually are better at controlling the pace of in-person discussions to ensure all members are included—when discussions are managed by non-deaf individuals, the leaders often do not pause to wait for interpreters to finish interpreting so everyone has an equal chance to participate

The use of asynchronous online discussions removed the barriers that often exist for out-of-classroom work between deaf/hard-of-hearing students and hearing students because it is difficult to obtain interpreting services for these in-person meetings. Additionally, this enabled the hearing and the deaf/hard-of-hearing students to get to know each other and learn how to work with each other. At the end of the quarter, both groups of students reported that they learned a lot from each other and enjoyed having an opportunity to work together. They also reported that this type of interaction rarely occurred in their other classes.

Conclusion

I strongly believe that blending courses enhances learning. Based on the results of blending the History and Systems of Psychology course, compared to the students in my previous non-blended session of this course, the blended students learned more material, participated more in discussions (both online and in-class) and were more able to integrate and apply what they learned. The use of online discussions also enabled students to get to know each other better and for deaf/hard-of-hearing and hearing students to work together without communication barriers. I believe I could significantly improve my teaching and my students' learning if I blended all of my courses or at least used more of the myCourses features in all of my courses.



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